

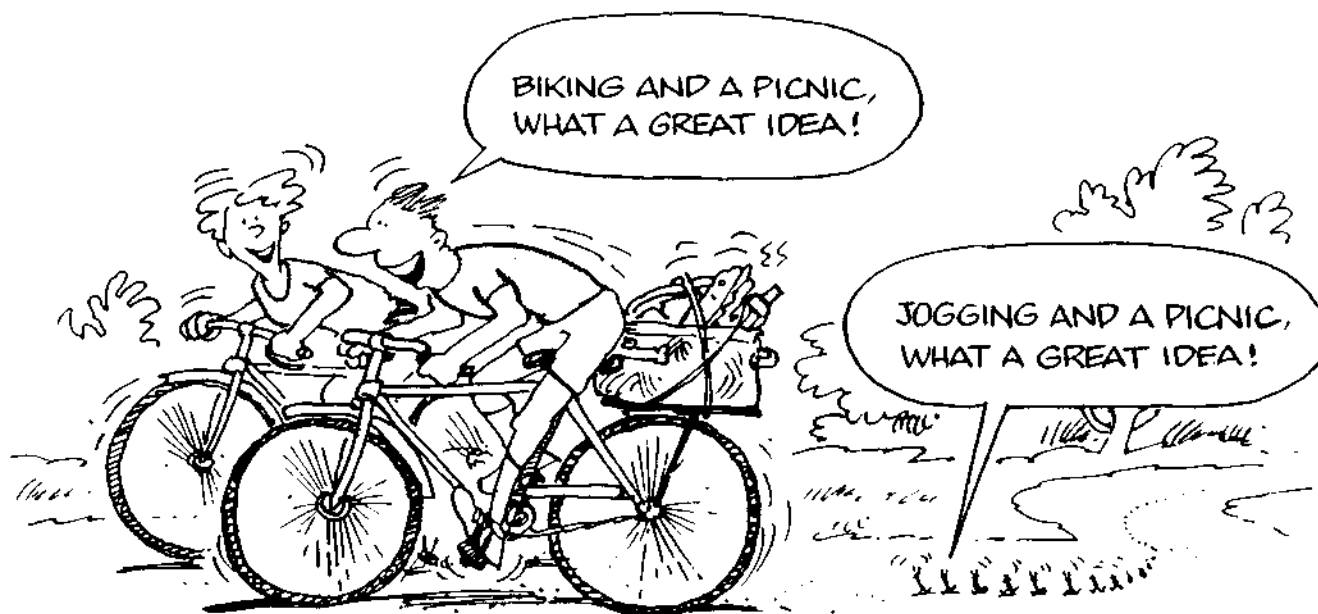
A Look at Leisure

March, 1994

No. 33

PARTICIPATION TODAY

This bulletin examines the current participation patterns of Albertan families. The primary data source for this report is the Alberta Recreation Survey conducted in 1992 by Alberta Community Development, in cooperation with Calgary, Edmonton and Randall Conrad and Associates. Comparisons with the findings of previous surveys in the suite show how preferences for recreation activities are changing in Alberta.



Alberta
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



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INTRODUCTION

Those involved in the provision of recreation services must be aware of current participation rates and trends. If today's consumer needs are to be met, and if those of tomorrow are to be anticipated, one must know what is happening today.

The participation data collected by the 1993 Alberta Recreation Survey give us an up-to-date reading of today's recreation preferences and activities. These are reported in the first part of this Bulletin. The second part introduces data from the 1981, 1984 and 1988 surveys to illustrate how the picture is changing.

A great deal of recreation research is directed towards explaining how recreation activity patterns and preferences vary according to social and economic attribute. This bulletin will examine some of these questions. Our chief emphasis will be on variation according to community size, household income and age of the respondent.

HIGHLIGHTS

First, a few of the main findings of the study:

Walking, driving, bicycling, being a spectator, swimming in pools, and doing a craft topped the list as far as participation was concerned, each done by more than 50% of households.

Physical activities with the highest participation rates were walking, bicycling, swimming, ice skating and golf, each being practiced by at least 40% of households. This list is very similar to that of our previous surveys. Participation rates have, however, declined in a number of the activities.

As we reported after our 1988 survey, there is little variation in the rankings of top activities when the data are analyzed by community size, household income or family type.

After our last survey we reported that participation in a number of activities had consistently fallen over the '80s. We can now repeat that statement, showing continued declines in a number of key activities.

HOUSEHOLD PARTICIPATION

The current survey was similar to the 1988 survey. It examined household participation in 64 activities. These included creative, cultural and general recreation activities, as well as many outdoor and sports pursuits.

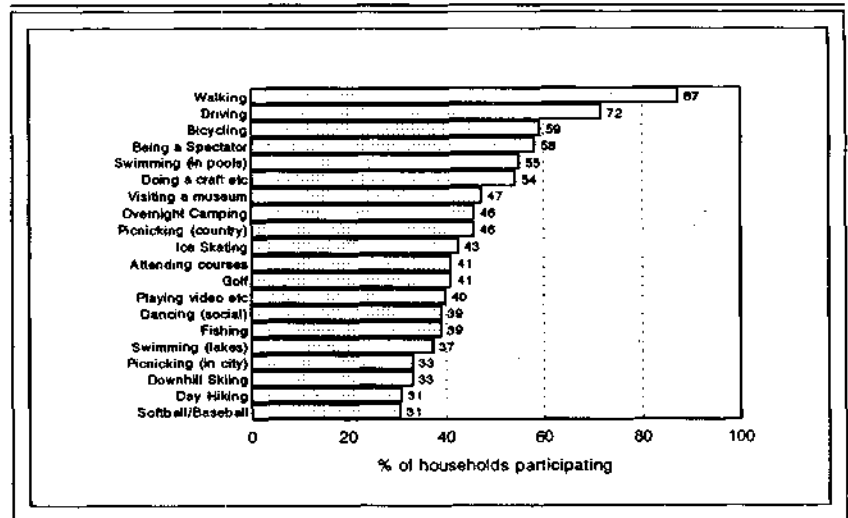
For each activity, it is possible to identify "participating households". These were households having at least one member who participated in the activity during the previous year. These participation rates thus reflect the involvement of both adults and children.



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The 20 activities with the highest levels of household participation are shown in Figure 1. Although these are the "Top 20" activities in the province, it is evident that the percentages of participating households differ considerably (from 87% for walking to 31% for softball/baseball).

Figure 1: Top Twenty Activities in 1992
Household Participation Rate



ARS '92

Walking for pleasure, bicycling, swimming, ice skating, golf, dancing, downhill skiing and softball/baseball are the most physically active pursuits in this top 20 grouping. Softball/baseball is the highest ranked of the team sports.

Examples of activities in which fewer than ten percent of households participated are mountain climbing, shooting, skateboarding, backpacking, squash, motorized trail biking, archery and river rafting.

PARTICIPATION VARIATION How do patterns of participation compare for different sub-groups of the population? We looked at participation in activities according to different socio-demographic variables. These included:

- Size of community;
- Household income; and,
- Type of household (such as families, single persons).

We found that the top-ranked activities were very consistent



We found that the top-ranked activities were very consistent across sub-groups of the population. The most popular were basically the same for residents of small and large communities, lower and higher income families, and various types of households.

For most activities, however, actual rates of participation did vary across socio-demographic groups. Some of the patterns associated with community size and household income are summarized below.

Community Size

There were many activities which varied in participation across communities of various sizes. The most striking differences in activity patterns appear to occur between communities under 10,000 people and those with populations over 10,000. It is also interesting to note that, for many activities, participation rates for rural residents are higher than for urban residents.

Figure 2 identifies community types which have participation rates more than 25% from the provincial average. Motocross, curling, fishing, hunting, and snowmobiling are activities which are more likely to be enjoyed by residents of smaller communities and farms than by those from larger urban centres, while the latter are more likely to play squash.

Previous Look at Leisure bulletins (No. 19, No. 25) identified similar patterns. These also discussed some of the factors contributing to variations in recreation behaviors for different sizes of communities.

Household Income

Variation in participation was also associated with household income. For almost every activity, households' participation rates increased with income level. Examples of this pattern are provided in Figure 3. Other activities which show a similar trend include bicycling, camping and boating.



Figure 2: Community Size and Participation

Activity	Rural	Under 2,000	2,000 4,999	5,000 9,999	10,000 24,999	25,000 99,999	100,000 or more
Moto-cross	+	+	+	-	+	+	-
Curling	+	+	+	+	+		-
Hunting	+	+	+	+	+		-
Picnicking In City		-	-	-		+	
Snowmobiling	+	+	+		+		-
Played Squash		-	-	-			+
Archery	+	+	+		+		
Used ATV	+		+		+		-
Played Ringette		+	-	+	+		
Shooting	+	+	+				-
Trail Biking	+		+		+		-
Played Badminton	+	+			+		
Fishing			+	+	+		
Did Judo/karate		-	+		-		
Mountain Climbing			-	+	-		
Orienteering	+		+			+	

+Participation > 25% higher than the average.
 -Participation > 25% lower than the average.

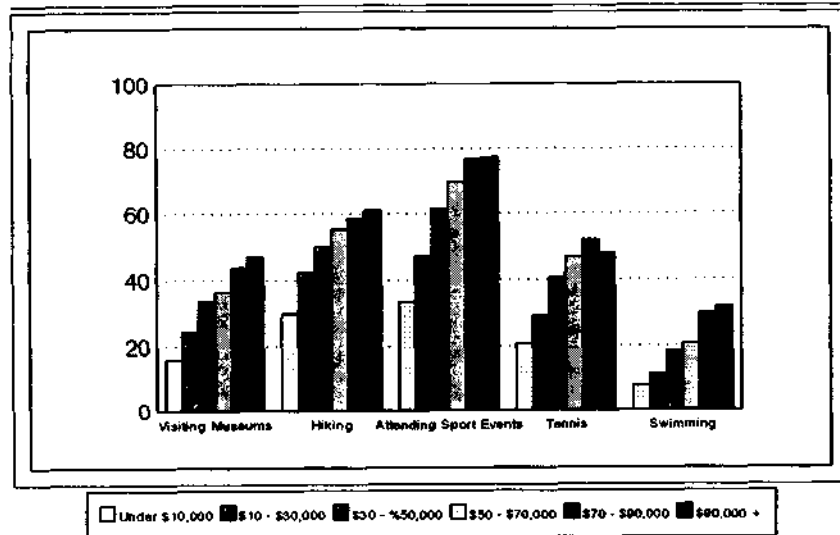
RESPONDENT PARTICIPATION Information was also obtained about respondent participation.

This provides a measure of adult participation. For the most part, adult (respondent) participation patterns were very similar to household participation patterns. The top 18 activities were identical for respondents and households, although there were some differences in ranking. The additional activities which appeared in the top 20 ranking for respondents (but not for households) are:

- o Picnicking within a city (30% of respondents);
- o Weight lifting/body building (27 %);
- o Motor boating (27%); and,
- o Day hiking (27%).



Figure 3: Participation and Household Income
Selected Activities



496 103

Respondent participation data is used to look at individual characteristics such as age, education, and gender to further describe how participation in activities varies for different sub-groups of the population.

For most activities, rates of participation decline with age. Activities which appear to have the most stable participation across age groups include curling, cross-country skiing, doing crafts or hobbies, visiting museums, theatres, or galleries, walking, and driving for pleasure.

RECREATION PREFERENCES

Recreation preferences vary with the socio-demographic characteristics of participants. In addition to providing this type of descriptive information, recreation researchers are concerned with trying to explain how recreation preferences develop and change throughout life.

Some of the factors which are studied include motivations and needs, the influence of friends, stages of the lifecycle, the desire for new activities versus the desire for familiar activities, and the availability of recreation opportunities.

Recreation researchers are now stressing the importance of early learning experiences on the leisure activity patterns of adults (e.g., Kamphorst, 1987). Using outdoor recreation



adults (e.g., Kamphorst, 1987). Using outdoor recreation activities as an example, McGuire et al (1987) identified two types of recreation participants. The largest percentage started most of their activities prior to the age of 21, and showed very few changes as adults. A smaller group showed a growth in their range of leisure activities throughout their lives, and particularly after the age of 50. Horna (1987) found that people become "locked into" preferences for physical or cultural activities early in life. As adults, their activity choices are influenced by peers, friends, and spouse, but they rarely change categories or add activities from the other category.

If people do make changes in their leisure patterns, they are most likely to do so at certain stages in their life. For example, parenthood is a major turning point. In the early stages of parenthood, there are changes in the amount of time available for leisure activities. Parents search for activities in which they can participate with children, and much of leisure activity is home-based. As children become school-age, parents are then able to resume some of their earlier leisure activities (Horna, 1987a).

PARTICIPATION TRENDS

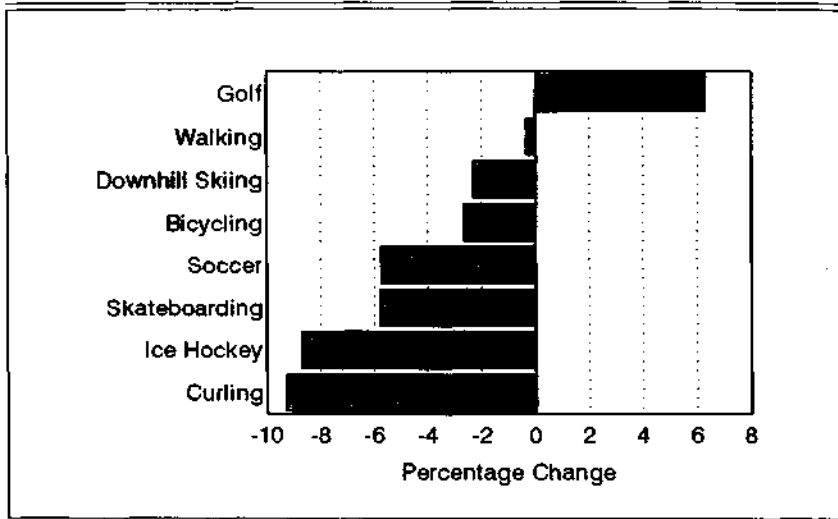
How do the 1992 findings compare with participation data from the 1981, 1984, and 1988 Public Opinion Surveys on Recreation? It was possible to compare most activities across the four surveys. Some activities such as reading, television viewing, and listening to the radio ranked highly in the early surveys but were not included in the 1988 and 1992 studies.

In all four years, creative, cultural, and passive activities ranked highly in terms of household participation. The most popular active pursuits were similar in all four surveys. Bicycling and fishing appear to have increased in popularity from 1981 to 1988, but have since dropped. Golf is the sole activity showing an increase over the full time period.

The 1992 household participation rates of eight of the twenty-eight activities for which trends could be tracked varied by less than 10% from the 1981 rates. These are illustrated in Figure 4.1 below. A further fourteen activities showed declines between 10% and 20% (see Figure 4.2), while the remaining six fell by more than 20%, as shown in Figure 4.3.

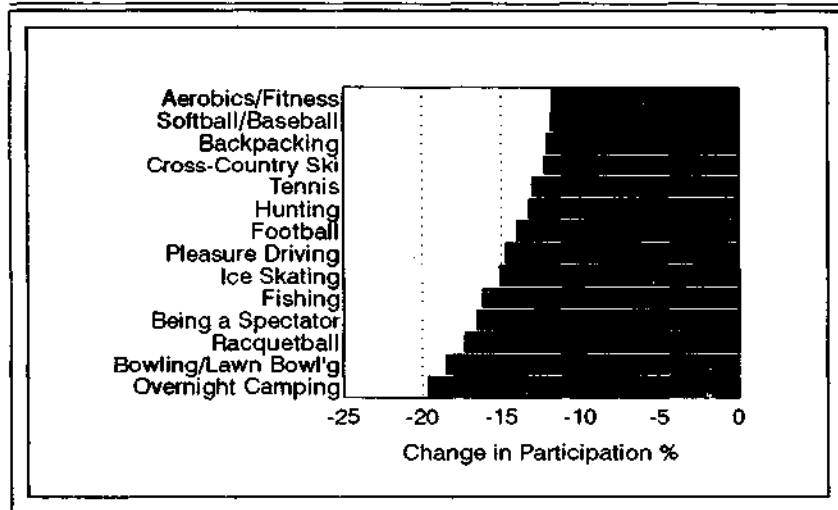


Figure 4.1: Household Participation '81-'92
Changes less than 10%



GRS '81, ARS '92

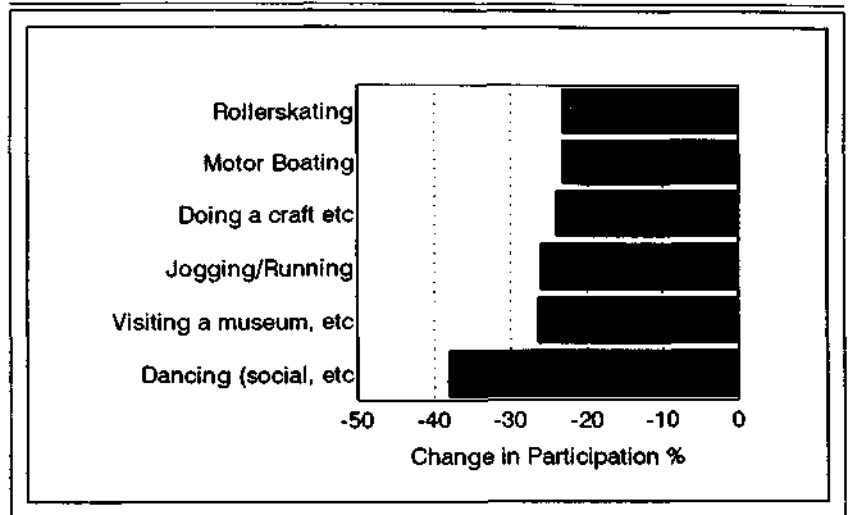
Figure 4.2: Participation Changes '81-'92
Changes of 10 - 20%



GRS '88, ARS '92



Figure 4.3: Participation Changes '81-'92
Changes More than 20%



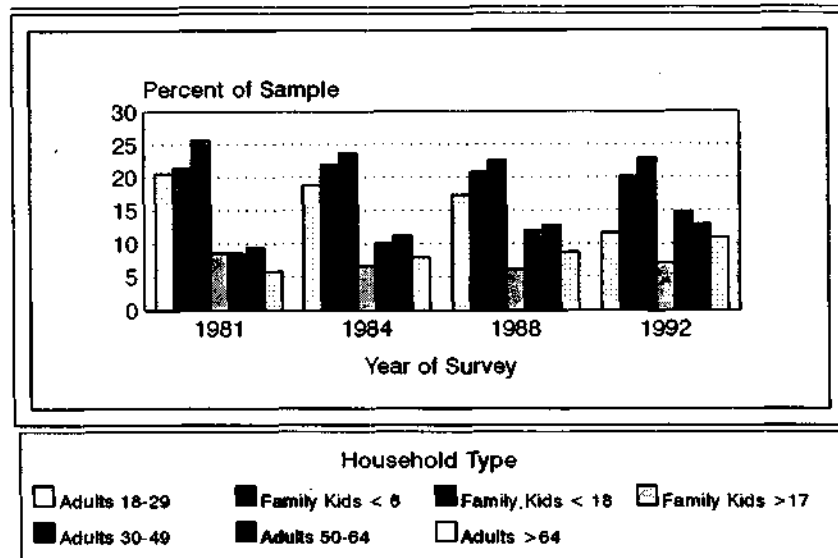
GRS '88, ARS '92



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graph, the proportion of households in Group 1 (adults 18 - 29 years of age) has fallen markedly over the survey period. The proportions of the households in groups 2, 3 and 4 have likewise declined, but at a much slower pace. The slight increases apparent in groups 3 and 4 may be the result of children staying home longer, rather than establishing separate residences. In sharp contrast, the adult households without children have increased markedly in proportion. This increase is most marked in group 5 (the 'Baby Boomers'), but is also very noticeable in groups 6 and 7.

Figure 5: Composition of Samples 1981 - 1992
by Household Type



As people move through their life cycles their recreation practices and preferences change. Our analyses lead us to believe that there are patterns which are predictable, and that knowledge of these patterns will assist communities in their planning, marketing and delivery efforts. In subsequent A Look at Leisure bulletins we hope to discuss specific activities, and suggest how changes in their participation rates may interact with changing demographic patterns to influence the way in which recreation programs must be presented.

There is also an increasing proportion of immigrants in the province. This segment of the population may have leisure interests which are different from the traditional activities addressed in our Recreation Surveys. As well, for many outdoor recreation activities, weather conditions such as lack of snow can influence participation patterns. As the period over which our data extend increases we become more sure



that short-term fluctuations such as these are not having an impact on our findings. As noted in previous Bulletins, the lack of discretionary funds may be a factor for many households, adversely affecting recreation participation.

The later surveys have not looked at frequency of participation, so it is not possible to determine if this has changed as well. Declining participation rates may not be evident if there is a core group of repeat users who patronize recreation facilities and programs. Although heavy repeat users of recreation facilities make up less than 10% of the adult population, this group provides the major share of use that occurs in public park and recreation agencies (Howard and Edginton, 1987).

IMPLICATIONS

Information on recreation participation is a basic tool for recreation researchers and practitioners. It provides one measure of demand for activities, and an indicator of how demand may be changing.

The survey data show that the most popular activities have remained relatively consistent during the 1980's. However, declining rates of participation are a concern. It will be a challenge to find out why these patterns are occurring, and what may be done to address some of these trends.

To assess local trends, recreation agencies and associations should look closely at the rates of participation they are experiencing for their programs. Maintaining good registration records will allow agencies to look at trends from year to year, and to share this information with others.

In order to best serve the needs of their clients, it will be necessary for recreation agencies to move into non-traditional service areas. O'Sullivan (1988) stresses the importance of recognizing the "baby-boom" market, which is large and will have income available for leisure pursuits. For example, the increased interest in travel shown by baby-boomers is one area that could be incorporated into recreation programming (O'Sullivan, 1988).

Early life leisure experiences are an important basis of adult leisure preferences. What implications does this have for recreation programming. To what extent are the leisure patterns of today's children and youth an indication of leisure demand in the future?

We are now recognizing the importance of the "repeat" user of recreation facilities and programs. Special attention should be given to "building a loyal following of repeat participants", in addition to attracting new customers. There



is a great deal of potential to increase attendance by simply keeping and holding on to existing users (Howard and Edginton, 1987). Understanding the reasons why people join a program, and how their needs change during the program are important ingredients in obtaining this goal.

This bulletin has outlined some of the recreation patterns and trends we are observing in Alberta. The changing demand for leisure activities is just one of the many challenges to be faced by recreation practitioners as we move into the 1990's.

THE NEXT ISSUE

The next issue in the Look at Leisure series will focus on FAVORITE ACTIVITIES. It will examine respondents' favorite activities and their reasons or motivations for participating in these activities.

MORE INFORMATION

Would you like more information about A Look at Leisure publication or the background research reports? Do you have any requests for future A Look at Leisure topics? For further information about the survey, or to have your mailing address changed, please contact:

Chip Ross, Alberta Community Development, 10405 Jasper Ave., Edmonton, Alberta, T5J 3N4 Phone: 427-2968 (Voice), 427-0263 (Fax), 422-3063 (BBS), INTERNET: CHIP ROSS@mts.uacs.ualberta.ca

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